

## **Early Seventh-day Adventist Views on Calvin and Calvinism**

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Over the course of their history, Seventh-day Adventists have repeatedly acknowledged their debt to the Protestant Reformation. Nowhere else is this acknowledgment more clearly made than in Ellen G. White's *Great Controversy*.<sup>1</sup> In that work, White weaves together a narrative centering on how God's truth had been preserved and passed down throughout the history of Western Christianity. Prominent in that narrative are the stories of the precursors and major leaders of the Protestant Reformation. Nowhere is the close connection that Adventists feel toward the reformers more clearly expressed than in the 1957 book, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, which portrays Adventism as a continuation of "the noble line of witnesses such as [John] Wycliffe, [Martin] Luther, [William] Tyndale, [John] Calvin, [John] Knox, [John] Wesley, and other great leaders of the past."<sup>2</sup>

Although Adventists have seen their roots in the Reformation, not all of the reformers have received equal attention. As a case in point, out of the ten chapters allotted to the Reformation period in *Great Controversy*, Luther's story is told in four chapters, while one chapter is given to

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911).

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 9.

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Wycliffe and Ulrich Zwingli each. John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and Calvin receive only half-chapter length treatments, while others such as Philip Melanchthon, Jacques Lefevre, William Farel, Menno Simons, and John Knox receive only passing notices. Clearly, there were greater and lesser lights among the Protestant reformers, but if one were to determine the relative stature of the reformers merely by the attention given in *Great Controversy*, most students of Christian history would rightly argue that the significance of Calvin was the most egregiously understated.

The reality is that Calvin has never enjoyed the kind of favor Adventists have shown toward Luther or Wesley. Although Adventists have traditionally shared many of the core teachings of Calvin such as the infallibility of the Bible as a whole, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, regeneration and sanctification of the believer, and the perpetuity of the moral law, they have always held suspicion toward Calvin and the Calvinist movement. Even in recent studies on the relationship between the Reformation and Adventism, one finds very few references to Calvin and his work in Geneva,<sup>3</sup> while some who call themselves “historic Adventists” have warned against the heretical “Calvinist connection” that has formed in the church.<sup>4</sup> As of yet, the historical relationship between Adventism and Calvin and Calvinism has received neither proper attention nor extended analysis. This paper seeks to fill part of that void by describing and analyzing the place and value of Calvin and Calvinism in the major writings of four major Seventh-day Adventist pioneers—John N. Andrews, Alonzo T. Jones, Uriah Smith, and Ellen G. White. This study does not attempt to ascertain theological influences of Calvin or Calvinism upon Adventism. Rather, it seeks merely to describe how the four Adventist pioneers viewed Calvin and Calvinism. Only the passages where the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, W. L. Emmerson, *The Reformation and the Advent Movement* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983). Notable exceptions are: Bryan W. Ball, *The English Connection* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke, 1981), and Hugh Dunton, Daniel Heinz, and Ronald Stradowsky, eds., *Heirs of the Reformation: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 1997). However, rather than tracing the roots of Adventism to the Reformation, these works tend toward merely pointing out similarities between reformers and Adventists.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Joe Crews, *The Calvinist Connection* (Frederick, MD: Amazing Facts, 1992).

writers make direct references to either Calvin, Calvinism, Presbyterianism, or the Reformed tradition receive treatment in this paper.

### **John N. Andrews**

John Nevins Andrews was the leading thinker and scholar among the earliest Seventh-day Adventist pioneers.<sup>5</sup> His intellect and balanced judgment commanded wide respect in the church. He was also the church's first official missionary to outside of North America. At his departure to Switzerland, Ellen White remarked that he was "the ablest man in all our ranks."<sup>6</sup>

Among the numerous books that he wrote for the advancement of the Adventist cause, Andrews made references to Calvin and Calvinism in three of his books: *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*,<sup>7</sup> *The Judgment: Its Events and Their Order*,<sup>8</sup> and *The Three Messages of Revelation XIV, 6-12*.<sup>9</sup> As Andrews referred to Calvin only once in passing in the latter two works, *History of the Sabbath* is of primary concern in this section.

In the passages where Andrews makes references to Calvin, it is difficult to establish his appraisal of Calvin. In the discussion of Calvin's position on the issue of the Sabbath and Sunday, Andrews's analysis is detached and objective. In general, Andrews's opinion of Calvin seems to be of cool disagreement. In Calvin, Andrews finds support for his thesis that Sunday replaced the seventh-day Sabbath on extra-biblical, thus illegitimate, grounds. Andrews finds ammunition against the Sunday-keepers of his time in Calvin's statements from the *Institutes* that the Christian Sunday is not a simple continuation of the Jewish Sabbath changed into the first day of the week, but a distinctively Christian

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<sup>5</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. "Andrews, John Nevins."

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White to Brethren in Switzerland, Aug. 29, 1878, as quoted in George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 66.

<sup>7</sup> John N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1873).

<sup>8</sup> John N. Andrews, *The Judgment: Its Events and Their Order* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890).

<sup>9</sup> John N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation XIV, 6-12* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892).

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institution that has no inherent sanctity but a functional one.<sup>10</sup> Andrews adroitly utilizes Calvin's own admission that the "ancients" changed the day of worship and that clinging to the seventh day of the week has no special meaning.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Andrews uses Calvin's writings as a polemic tool against the arguments set forth by Sunday-keeping Christians of the mid-nineteenth century that change in the day of worship occurred in the New Testament era.

Elsewhere in the same book, Andrews makes reference to Calvin as a theological authority on points other than the doctrine of the Sabbath.<sup>12</sup> In one of these instances, he quotes another author who has called Calvin "great" and as possessing "sagacity."<sup>13</sup> Calvin's greatness is further recognized in Andrews's *The Judgment*. In his discussion of the interpretation of 1 Cor 6:2, Andrews makes use of a quote of another writer who lists "modern divines" such as "Luther, Calvin, Erasmus, Beza. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Such a deferential reference to Calvin is counterbalanced in *The Three Messages of Revelation XIV, 6-12*, where Andrews makes a criticism of Calvin's persecution of Michael Servetus, an anti-Trinitarian agitator of the sixteenth century. He uses this episode in Calvin's work as an example of how easily the power of the church, if absolute, gets corrupted. He writes:

When the papal church possessed power, it destroyed a vast multitude of the saints of God. Nor has the Protestant Church, since its rise, been free from acts of persecution whenever it has possessed the power to perform them. The Protestants of Geneva, with John Calvin at their head, burned Michael Servetus, a man who had barely escaped the same fate at the hands of the popish inquisition. They did this for the same reason that the papists do the like; that is, they did it for a difference of opinion, and because they had the power to do it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *History of the Sabbath*, 438, 439. The section in Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion* that Andrews quotes from is book 2, chapter 8, paragraphs 31-34.

<sup>11</sup> See *History of the Sabbath*, 436-446.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, 10, 74, 239.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>14</sup> *The Judgment*, 122.

<sup>15</sup> *The Three Messages of Revelation XIV, 6-12*, 44.

The criticism is even more damning in that Andrews draws a direct parallel between Calvin and the papacy which Calvin opposed vehemently.

In conclusion, Andrews's view of Calvin is at best mixed. Without a doubt, Andrews views Calvin as a figure to be reckoned with in church history and recognizes his theological contributions, though through the words of others. However, when it comes to the issue of the Sabbath, Andrews uses Calvin's writings against Calvin himself and against those Sunday-keeping Christians who claim that there are Scriptural grounds for change in the day of worship. Calvin then becomes the object of a scathing attack by Andrews over the execution of Servetus—an act which Andrews likens to “the popish inquisition.”<sup>16</sup> Such an assessment of Calvin—as a theological force and an ecclesiastical despot—is a recurring picture painted by Adventists of the nineteenth century.

#### **Alonzo T. Jones**

Alonzo Trevier Jones was among Adventism's first historians. As “the denomination's most prominent speaker for religious freedom,”<sup>17</sup> he tended to view history from the perspective of the continuing controversy between the oppressive civil-ecclesiastical majority and the persecuted religious minority. All his historical works fall in line with such a perspective, and it is in this context that Calvin and Calvinism are viewed. Two of Jones's works include meaningful references to Calvin and Calvinism. They are *Civil Government and Religion*<sup>18</sup> and *The Two Republics*.<sup>19</sup>

In his 1889 book, *Civil Government and Religion*, Jones makes only one reference to Calvin. This reference comes in the context of his repudiation of David McAllister, a spokesperson for the National Reform movement which was pushing for a national Sunday law. McAllister had stated that the movement would not result in persecution against those who believe differently from the majority and declared: “True religion never

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Jones, Alonzo T.”

<sup>18</sup> Alonzo T. Jones, *Civil Government and Religion, or Christianity and the American Constitution* (Chicago: American Sentinel, 1889).

<sup>19</sup> Alonzo T. Jones, *The Two Republics; or, Rome and the United States of America* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1891).

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persecutes,” even if it was united with the civil government.<sup>20</sup> In reaction to this assertion, Jones points out that

the Roman Catholic religion is not the only persecuting religion that has been in the world. Presbyterianism persecuted while John Calvin ruled in Geneva; it persecuted while the Covenanters ruled in Scotland; it persecuted while it held the power in England . . . . Every religion that has been allied with the civil power, or that has controlled the civil power, has been a persecuting religion; and such will always be the case.<sup>21</sup>

Presaging Andrews’s analysis, Jones here makes a sharp criticism of Calvin’s role in exercising civil authority for a religious end. Clearly, the Servetus affair is on his mind as he portrays Calvin as a persecuting power who acted just like the Roman Catholics. Furthermore, Jones seems to be reacting to two things: (1) the “popish” dogmatism of Calvin; and (2) Calvinism as a domineering force not only during the Reformation but also in the ensuing times. Though the denominational affiliations of Jones’s opponents are not clearly identified, his citation of Presbyterian persecution throughout history seems to be a not-so-subtle reference to the Calvinist background of many behind the Sunday law movement. In Jones’s mind, not only the historical papacy, but also Calvinism of his time are potential persecutors of God’s true religion.

Jones continues this line of argument in his 1891 work, *The Two Republics*. In this book, he has a section entitled “Calvinism in Geneva.” He begins this section by stating that “[t]he views of Calvin on the subject of Church and State, were as thoroughly theocratic as the papal system itself.”<sup>22</sup> Pointing out Calvin’s efforts to secure the oath of each citizen of Geneva to profess and swear to the confession drawn up by Calvin himself, Jones observes that “[t]his was at once to make the Church and the State one and the same thing with the Church above the State. Yea, more than this, it was wholly to swallow up the civil in the ecclesiastical power . . . .”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Civil Government and Religion*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *The Two Republics*, 586.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Clearly, Jones's criticism of Calvin's theocracy is based on the distinctly American understanding of the separation of church and state. But when it comes to his treatment of Luther in the same chapter, Jones turns much more generous—and wrong about history: "It is not without cause that Luther stands at the head of all men in the great Reformation and in the history of Protestantism: for he alone of all the leaders in the history of Reformation times held himself and his cause aloof from the powers of this world, and declined all connection of the State with the work of the gospel, even to support it."<sup>24</sup> Given Luther's nationalism in his "Appeal to the German Nobility," his association with the German princes, the Wartburg period, and his position vis-à-vis the Peasants' Revolt, Jones's statement that Luther did not even have any "connection of the State" appears hardly tenable. Historically, both Luther and Calvin were active supporters of the idea of cooperation and even collusion of the church and the state. Yet it is only Calvin who receives Jones's condemnation in this chapter probably because Calvin went much beyond Luther in taking an active part in governing Geneva and wielded a great amount of power. Apparently, for Jones, this made all the difference, as he calls Calvin the Protestant counterpart to the pope and Calvinism "so close a counterpart" to "the papacy itself."<sup>25</sup> Commenting on the efforts of the National Reform Association, Jones writes, "it is a revival of the original scheme of John Calvin, and is the very image of the papal scheme of the fourth century."<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, Jones consistently treats Calvin as a "popish" tyrant and his movement as a persecuting authority that fused religious and temporal powers to oppress minority religious groups. Seeing the rise of the National Reform movement in his time, Jones considers it as a continuation of the dangerously theocratic system as practiced two centuries earlier in Geneva. As to Calvin's positive contributions to the Protestant Reformation and its theology, Jones is completely silent, leaving his readers with a decidedly negative impression about the reformer.

### **Uriah Smith**

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 590.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

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Uriah Smith made his contribution to the Adventist church most prominently through his pen. *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* article on Smith begins with this summative introduction: “Editor and author, who gave 50 years of service to the SDA cause.”<sup>27</sup> The *Encyclopedia* goes on to state that Smith’s famous works on Daniel and Revelation<sup>28</sup> were the first of the “doctrinal subscription books in the colporteur work of the SDA Church.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Smith was the first among the church’s theologians, and his influence has been profound and far-reaching.

Smith’s writings betray the same negative view that Andrews and Jones held toward Calvin’s persecution of certain minority groups of his day. Once again, the burning of Servetus is cited as an evidence of the spirit of oppression and intolerance that Smith saw in the Calvinism of his time. In Smith’s *Daniel and the Revelation*, an updated and consolidated version of his earlier separate works on the two prophetic books of the Bible, the Servetus incident is brought out not only to show the potential of persecution in the nineteenth century, but also to point out that Protestantism has always held the spirit of Babylon as seen in Rev 14:8.<sup>30</sup> Smith does not elaborate further, thus readers are left with a clear connection between Calvin and the eschatological Babylon. Smith asserts that not only Calvinism, but also all the other churches of the Reformation are headed toward the apostasy of forming “the universal worldly church” that would oppress the people of God through the union of church and state.<sup>31</sup>

In *Looking unto Jesus*,<sup>32</sup> published also in 1897, Smith goes beyond the Servetus incident to critique certain features of the theology of Calvin and Calvinism. While discussing the Adventist teaching on Christ’s post-1844 ministry in the heavenly Most Holy Place, Smith stresses that Christ is

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<sup>27</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Smith, Uriah.”

<sup>28</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1867); and idem, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Daniel* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1873).

<sup>29</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Smith, Uriah.”

<sup>30</sup> Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1897), 605.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 604.

<sup>32</sup> Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1897).



working in heaven now to bring humanity to a literal “at-one-ment” with him. In so defining, Smith found himself at odds with the dominant Calvinist thinking of his day that taught the atonement to have been completed at the cross. There does not seem to have been any doubt in Smith’s mind that Christ’s death was salvific and all-sufficient. Yet it was by the virtue of His blood that the only conditions of the atonement were met, and not that the atonement was completed. He would agree that Christ’s life and death are redemptive but never atoning: “The death of Christ and the atonement *are not* the same thing.”<sup>33</sup>

For Smith, true atonement (i.e., antitypical “at-one-ment” with God) could only begin on the antitypical Day of Atonement that commenced in 1844. Once the cross is recognized as the completion of the atonement, he reasoned, the only logical conclusion could be either “ultra Calvinism, fore-ordination and predestination in their most forbidding and unscriptural aspect”<sup>34</sup> (that since completion can only mean the sealing of everyone’s fate—in this case, for the salvation of the elect) or Universalism (that all humanity will ultimately be saved). Fiercely Arminian in his soteriology, he rejected the Calvinist understanding on the ground that it robs free will from the individual and that it either limits salvation to the predestined elect or broadens it to all of humanity. Therefore, his uniquely Adventist understanding of the atonement led Smith to view the Calvinist teachings of the atonement as full of “errors”<sup>35</sup> and representing “an insurmountable problem.”<sup>36</sup>

In summary, Smith’s criticism of Calvin and Calvinism were two-fold. Like Andrews and Jones, he viewed Calvin’s persecution of Servetus and other instances of persecution in the history of Calvinism as signs of the oppressive spirit of the end-time apostate religion. He also found the Calvinist theology of predestination clearly objectionable and totally incompatible with the Adventist teaching on the atonement. Since he, like many other Adventists, thought of the atonement as the heavenly work of Christ that commenced in 1844, Smith could not see the atonement as

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 237. Italics in the original.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 240

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 269.

having occurred and completed at the cross as Calvinists had understood it to be.

### Ellen G. White

Among the four early Adventist leaders whose writings are the subjects of this study, Ellen White provides the most detailed and surprisingly positive picture of the life, teachings, and work of Calvin. In fact, nowhere in her writings can explicit criticism of Calvin's actions or theology be found.

The first reference to Calvin by White is found in *Spirit of Prophecy*, published in 1884. In a section where she addresses the line of biblical truth throughout Christian history, she writes: "Across the gulf of a hundred years, men stretched their hands to grasp the hands of the Lollards of the time of Wycliffe. Under Luther began the Reformation in Germany; Calvin preached the gospel in France,<sup>37</sup> Zwingle [sic] in Switzerland. The world was awakened from the slumber of ages, as from land to land were sounded the magic words, 'Religious Liberty.'"<sup>38</sup> This brief statement is the only reference to Calvin in the book. Whereas Luther receives an extensive treatment by White over four chapters and English reformers such as William Tyndale, John Knox, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer collectively receive a chapter, Calvin is not mentioned again. This is, nonetheless, a noteworthy "improvement" on *Spiritual Gifts*, the predecessor to the *Spirit of Prophecy* series, where only a single chapter is devoted to the Reformation and Luther is the sole reformer mentioned.<sup>39</sup>

White's uncommonly positive statement on Calvin stands in clear contrast to the way her Adventist contemporaries viewed the Genevan reformer. Whereas others saw Calvin as the prime example of religious

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<sup>37</sup> While Calvin's ministry extended well into France and he spent about three years as a pastor in Strasbourg, France, his work as a Protestant reformer was centered in Geneva in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. This reference may reflect White's partial understanding of history or a more generic, imprecise use of the word "France" to refer to French-speaking lands.

<sup>38</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1884), 93.

<sup>39</sup> See Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1858), 119-122.

oppression by Protestantism, White lifts him up as a torchbearer of God's truth and champion of religious liberty.

When it comes to the historical followers of Calvin, however, White is not kind in her evaluation. She laments that the spirit of reform has declined in the Presbyterian churches. "It is a sad thing," she writes, "when a people claiming to be reformers cease to reform."<sup>40</sup> Such a bifurcated assessment—extolling Calvin but criticizing Calvinists—is fully fleshed out when White gives a fuller treatment in *Great Controversy*, the fifth book in the *Conflict of the Ages* series.

When she updated volume 4 of the *Spirit of Prophecy* series and re-published as *The Great Controversy* in 1888, White added a half-chapter length account of the life and ministry of Calvin as part of the larger Reformation narrative. This was retained essentially in the same format in the 1911 re-publication of the book. Once again, White shows great preference for Luther by allotting four chapters to him. Nonetheless, her treatment of Calvin is quite significant in that it provides a depiction of Calvin that is not found elsewhere in early Adventist literature.

Midway into the chapter entitled "The French Reformation," White introduces young Calvin as "a thoughtful, quiet youth, already giving evidence of a powerful and penetrating mind, and no less marked for the blamelessness of his life than for intellectual ardor and religious devotion."<sup>41</sup> Over the course of the next eighteen pages, White narrates some of the highlights of Calvin's life from Paris to Bourges, then back to Paris and finally to Geneva. Drawn heavily from the historical writings of J. H. Merle d'Aubigné,<sup>42</sup> James A. Wylie,<sup>43</sup> and W. Carlos Martyn,<sup>44</sup> White's account reflects the glowingly positive assessment of Calvin as pronounced by these authors. Throughout the chapter, Calvin is portrayed as being continuously led by God not only into safety from persecutor, but also toward greater light of divine truth.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>42</sup> J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin*, 8 vols. (New York: Carter, 1866-1879).

<sup>43</sup> J. A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, n.d.).

<sup>44</sup> W. Carlos Martyn, *A History of the Huguenots* (New York: American Tract Society, 1866).

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White's description of Calvin is particularly moving. When Calvin's cousin Olivetan introduced him to the "religion which is revealed in the Bible," the would-be reformer is described to have rejected it at first, but soon became engaged in "fruitless struggles" between his Catholic upbringing and the teachings of Protestantism for some time. This struggle continued until he witnessed the burning of a Protestant "heretic." Impressed by the peacefulness of the martyr, Calvin became determined to study the Bible and discover the same peace. Relying on Wylie and Martyn in this portion, White seems to imply a longer process of conversion than Calvin's own expression, "sudden conversion," suggests. After this conversion, White writes, "his words were as the dew falling to refresh the earth."<sup>45</sup>

After a narration of the trials of the Huguenots, White quickly brings Calvin to Geneva to that fateful meeting with William Farel who urged Calvin to stay and work to reform the city. White then describes the situation in Geneva and the evangelical need of the city as following: "Though Geneva had accepted the reformed faith, yet a great work remained to be accomplished here. It is not as communities but as individuals that men are converted to God; the work of regeneration must be wrought in the heart and conscience by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the decrees of councils."<sup>46</sup> White characterizes Calvin as the very man to lead that work of reform and regeneration in Geneva. As did Farel, she sees "the hand of God" and "Providence" in the arrival of Calvin to Geneva.<sup>47</sup>

However, White makes the interesting decision to abbreviate Calvin's work in Geneva—the most significant features of his life from the perspective of the theme of *Great Controversy*—into one short, sweeping paragraph:

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<sup>45</sup> *The Great Controversy*, 221. White's analysis seems to be in keeping with Heiko Oberman's interpretation that Calvin's "subito conversio" did not necessarily mean "sudden" in the temporal sense, but "unexpected," referring to the unanticipated nature of the experience. Heiko Oberman, "Subita Conversio: The 'Conversion' of John Calvin," in *Reformiertes Erbe: Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher Seinam 80 Geburtstag*, band 2, Heiko Oberman, Ernst Saxer, and Alfred Schindler, et al., eds. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 279-295.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

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For nearly thirty years Calvin labored at Geneva, first to establish there a church adhering to the morality of the Bible, and then for the advancement of the Reformation throughout Europe. *His course as a public leader was not faultless, nor were his doctrines free from error.* But he was instrumental in promulgating truths that were of special importance in his time, in maintaining the principles of Protestantism against the fast-returning tide of popery, and in promoting in the reformed churches simplicity and purity of life, in place of the pride and corruption fostered under the Romish teaching.<sup>48</sup>

In recognizing that Calvin “was not faultless” and that his theology was not “free from error,” White clearly is acknowledging to her readers that she is aware of the sharp objections that her Adventist and other Protestant contemporaries were making to Calvin. But just as she does with Luther, White focuses on the positive contributions of Calvin and extols the virtues of his work in Geneva instead of criticizing him for his political and theological problems. This approach, of course, is in stark contrast to the assessments of Calvin given by other Adventist writers of her time. Her treatment of the reformer, in effect, goes against the sharply critical, one-sided portrayal of Calvin as a politico-theological despot that others make and provides a much-needed balance in assessing the legacy of Calvin.

In the closing paragraph of her narrative on the enigmatic reformer, she takes care to point out that Calvin’s Geneva was primarily a “refuge for the hunted Reformers of all Western Europe,” and that the “[s]tarving, wounded, bereft of home and kindred . . . were warmly welcomed and tenderly cared for . . . .”<sup>49</sup> To the end, Ellen White seems to be intent on putting Calvin in the best light possible by showing that, in spite of his failings, he was a true reformer used by God.

When it comes to Calvin’s theological heirs, however, White takes a considerably more critical stance, as she did in *Spirit of Prophecy*. Several chapters later in *Great Controversy*, she provides assessment of the Protestant churches of her time by quoting from Daniel Neal’s history of the Puritans:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Italics supplied.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

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For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation . . . the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their time, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God, but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received.<sup>50</sup>

In another section, White exposes what she perceives as yet another dangerous problem of the Reformed churches—their increasingly “conciliatory course” toward Catholicism. She warns that this move will ultimately cost them “the liberty of conscience which had been so dearly purchased.”<sup>51</sup>

These criticisms notwithstanding, it is important to note that White does not make a wholesale condemnation of the modern heirs of Calvin. Her criticisms are not sharper than some of the counsels that she gives to fellow Adventists. There is always an underlying concern and appeal for reform. In this way, White’s attitude is markedly different from other Adventist writers who seem to be occupied with polemics.

In summary, White is different from her contemporaries—Andrews, Jones and Smith—in that she makes an overall positive assessment of Calvin and represents his work in Geneva as a divinely-led reform which occupies an important place in the continuing line of God’s truth. She is eager to acknowledge Adventism’s debt to Calvin and to recognize his rightful place in the noble line of reformers—a far cry from Jones’s charge that Calvin and his movement were part of the eschatological Babylon. Meanwhile, she is critical of the loss of the reform impulse among the modern followers of Calvin and the rapprochement between Protestantism and Catholicism. But her criticisms include hopeful appeals and warnings—calling for genuine, biblical reform among the heirs of Calvin.

## **Conclusions**

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans*, vol. 1 (Portsmouth, NH: Charles Ewer, 1844), 269, as quoted in *ibid.*, 292.

<sup>51</sup> *The Great Controversy*, 563.

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For the most part, the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church held a negative view of John Calvin and Calvinist churches. Adventist pioneers came mostly from the Arminian-Methodist tradition and held strongly to the principle of separation of church and state. Having witnessed the exclusivist tendencies of the New England Puritan culture and having experienced harsh treatment by Calvinist-Puritans for their theological peculiarities, early Adventist leaders viewed Calvin's theocratic initiatives in Geneva and harsh discipline of dissidents as signs of moral failure and spiritual apostasy and the root cause of their nineteenth-century contemporaries' persecutory tendencies. They held that no true reform has a place for the unity of civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Thus, they condemned Calvin to the point of accusing him of becoming "popish" figure and a part of the Babylon of Rev 14. When they saw a movement to legislate religion in the Calvinist churches of their day, they were eager to point out that contemporary Calvinists were only following the tragic footsteps of their founder. Notable among those who held to these views were Andrews, Jones and Smith.

Smith added a theological dimension to the Adventist criticism of Calvinism. In his discussion of the atonement, he argued that the Calvinist teaching that the atonement was completed at the cross can only be valid if one accepted the Calvinist concept of predestination. Since Adventists and the rest of the Arminian world do not subscribe to the doctrine of predestination as taught in Calvinism, Smith asserted that it is wrong to say that the atonement was completed at cross. Then, he connected the Arminian doctrine of free will and atonement with the Adventist teaching of the investigative judgment. He argued that the cross was only a prerequisite of the post-1844, antitypical atonement taking place in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, it would be erroneous to state, as the Calvinists do, that the atonement was completed at the cross.

Ellen White was a notable exception among early Adventists in her portrayal of Calvin and Calvinism. In what must have been a startling revelation, she portrays Calvin as a genuine and caring reformer. Her description of Calvin in *Great Controversy* is filled with praise and admiration for the reformer. By acknowledging the hand of God in the life and ministry of Calvin, White provided an important balance to the Adventist view of Calvin. Even when making criticisms of the Calvinists

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of her day, White never used disparaging words but only lamented their decline and appealed to them to take up the reform that Calvin began.

In spite of the balance that White has brought to the Adventist view of Calvin and Calvinism, it appears that some in contemporary Adventism still have reservations about approaching the French Swiss reformer with congeniality and appreciation. Calvinism is still viewed with suspicion by many, and some even seem to believe that there is a Calvinist conspiracy to contaminate the historic Adventist faith.<sup>52</sup>

While Adventists should be ever vigilant in their protection of the integrity of their faith and beliefs, an overly negative attitude toward Calvin and Calvinism, or any other individual theologian or movement, does not seem fair, healthy, or necessary. White, in this regard, provides contemporary Adventism with an example of thoughtful appreciation of and qualified agreement with those of different theological persuasions and priorities.

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<sup>52</sup> See Crews, *The Calvinist Connection*.